

Written for the Lady's Book.

PRIMARY SCHOOLS.

BY MRS. LYDIA H. SIGOURNEY.

Much light on the great subject of Education, has dawned upon the present age. Yet broad wastes are still unilluminated. "There remaineth yet, very much land to be possessed." The theorist may have made prosperous way through the wilderness of conflicting opinions; but the practical teacher seems yet to stand upon Pisgah, exploring a varied and beautiful heritage, not yet fully reclaimed from the heathen.

Philosophical writers have laboured to illustrate the different departments of mind. They have unfolded its chart, and said, "here is a stream, and there is a mountain, and there a valley." But have they told us how the stream may be guided, until it becomes a river? how it may fertilize and gladden its banks, until it meet the sea? Have they pointed out among the rocks, and tangled foliage of the mountain, the sunny spots which are capable of culture or ornament? Have they instructed us, how the valley may be best made rich for the harvest? how its fruits may be safely gathered into the garner of eternal life?

It is the province of the faithful teacher to enter the field which the philanthropist has described; to test the validity of the precepts, which the sage has promulgated. And is not this office as honourable as it is responsible? The Emperor of Russia has directed the females of his family to engage in the work of instruction, and in St. Petersburg are several schools over which they preside. The Pacha of Egypt has induced an English lady to take charge of one hundred female pupils at Cairo, and to give countenance to so strange a movement in a Mahomedan realm, where it is doubted whether women have souls, has placed his own daughters under her tuition. The king of Greece treats, with respect and confidence, the lady from our own land, who educates several hundred children at Athens, and causes to be supported at her school a delegation of girls, from the different provinces of that classic clime. If the rulers of the Old World, even in some of the strong holds of despotism, are disposed to show honour to teachers, our own country, where a right education is emphatically the safety and defence of the people, ought not to be backward in following the example.

It is but too often the case, that primary schools are undervalued, or their interests committed to unskilful hands. The assertion is sometimes made, that "any one will do to keep a school for *little children*." Any decayed, ignorant woman, unable otherwise to earn a living, whose dim eyes fail to guide the needle aright, or from whose palsied hand, the distaff had fallen, *she* is pronounced fit to gather around her the freshest, youngest spirits; to spread out, and to inscribe at pleasure, the tenderest, most impressible page of human existence. Should this be so? Is he who builds a house inattentive to its foundations?—he who would erect a pyramid, careless to give solidity to its base? So, they who aid the mind in its earliest developments, should be qualified wisely and efficiently to use their delegated authority.

Primary schools are assuming more importance, in the opinion of the public, as the necessity of moral training becomes better understood. Intellectual edu-

cation was formerly considered almost the sole object of schools, and the culture of right principles pursued only as far as they advanced or impeded it. Yet is it not rather the true order of things, to give the highest place to that which regulates our duty here, and affects our happiness hereafter? If so, Knowledge should be enlisted in the service of Virtue, as a powerful ally; for we have too often seen, that when uncontrolled by such sacred influence it has been placed on the throne, its tendency is to blind and wayward, to selfish or criminal courses.

If we view the intellect as an instrument by which we arrive at the heart, those who educate the young should make every science, every lesson, an adjunct in the culture of right dispositions and correct conduct. Under such a system, the pupils who are least advanced in age, may prove their most promising subjects; for their hearts ripening sooner than their understandings, are more readily reached, more easily modified, less permanently injured by evil habit or example. Formerly, they were held in promiscuous schools, as a sort of hindrance or interruption to the elder classes. To keep their station on a hard bench with their little feet vainly reaching after the floor; to study strange characters; to be occasionally called to utter unintelligible sounds; to be bidden by nature to *move*, and by the teacher to *sit still*, and to *be still*; to wait with wide-open, wondering eyes, at a mysterious banquet of knowledge, and to find scarcely a crumb falling from the table for them, was but too often their portion. Like the children of Israel, in the land of bondage, they could not but "see that they were in evil case." Yet, as moral culture gains its true prominence, the "prisoners will be brought forth from the prison-house," and admitted as favoured students of that science which endureth, when "if there be tongues they shall cease, if there be knowledge it shall vanish away."

In bespeaking a due share of attention for those almost infantine pupils, which surely in promiscuous schools have been too much, and too long neglected, it may be well to consider the force and vitality of early impressions. Close observers of character perceive that they may spring up in unexpected forms, through every period of future life. When the seed is forgotten, when the hand that sowed it moulders in dust, it may be perfecting its fruit.

With what tenacity do the aged cling to the memories of their early years. Passing events are to them comparatively divested of interest. The hopes and passions, which agitate young hearts, have grown powerless. They are pondering the far-off lines of life's first pages, and the atmosphere of age, seems to act like the chemist's art, in restoring the time-worn manuscript. Tell them of the news, the fashions, the changes of the day. You win but a divided attention. The heart is elsewhere. The past has taken possession of their whole being. They are with the dead, burying their dead, or causing the dry bones to be anew covered with living flesh. The voice of their mother in the cradle-hymn, comes back to them, when the ear is deaf to the melody of "singing men and singing women." The lessons of their earliest

teachers, the scenery of their first school, are vivid before them, when they are about to pass from the discipline of earth to the rewards of eternity.

It is said of the aged Swiss and Germans, in the more anciently settled parts of Pennsylvania, that when death approaches, they are heard to speak in the languages learned in infancy, though they had been for years unaccustomed to their use. Teachers of primary schools! have you ever thought that the words which you utter to the little ones at your feet, the counsels which now they seem so lightly to regard, may grave themselves as with the point of a

diamond, and go with their souls to the judgment of the Great Day? Have you not, indeed, a dignified vocation, standing as you do, next to the mother, and she next to God? taking into your hand that which is never to die, and promising to restore it, to those who entrusted it, not only uninjured, but brighter, and more precious? Let your own deportment, your own life, be the lesson of your young pupils. Be diligent, be conscientious, be prayerful, be yourselves what you require of them to become, and doubt not that the Divine blessing will animate and repay your labours.

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